

Mondo
SXSW
film &
music
wrap-up

THE MERMEN

Volume 14, No. 29

cell phone retreat

MARCH 24, 1995

SXSW
live
shots

THE MERMEN

Saxon Pub, Friday 17

The Mermen are what SXSW is all about. It's about that one group that just a few weeks ago you didn't even know existed. And once that 45-minute showcase window of time closes, you wonder how you could have existed all this time without their music breathing life into soul. See, there, on my neck? Those are gills, and I have the Mermen to thank. Whereas their CD *Food For Other Fish* is majestic surf rock that builds and grows like your favorite Seventies metal epic while never losing the ambience of an empty beach at sunrise, this San Francisco's trio live show is a different fish altogether. It was obvious from the first song, the ominous "Be My Noir," when guitarist Jim Thomas exploded in a roaring wash of feed back that sounded more like a WWII air raid than the pleasant, one-dimensional surf cliches of Detroit's Goldentones, who preceded the Mermen. Like Laika and the Cosmonauts, with their space-age Esquivel-mutated surf schtick (in fine form at Maggie Mae's on Thursday), the Mermen expand the boundaries of "surf," and bring more to their music than just evocative, airy tones and soaring solos. They revel in dissonance, chaos, and volume. There's little that's dainty or delicate in their set, as proved by a pulverizing version of "The Silly Elephant Who Stomped to Tea" and the big bang of "Casbah" (found on their recent live compilation *Live at the Haunted House*). Ending their set with Thomas hitting drummer Martyn Jones' stuffed-pig decorated drum-kit cymbals with his Strat, while bassist Allen Whitman rammed his bass into his fish-covered amp, the Mermen proved that surf rock can sail into the Nineties with an alternative aesthetic for both the Emo's and Steamboat crowds. — Raoul Hernandez